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Civil Society Organisations and peacebuilding in Northern Ghana. Understanding the factors that have facilitated the successful entry of Civil Society Organizations in conflict zones

Kurzfassung: Zivilgesellschaftliche Organisationen (ZGOs) haben in dem Friedensprozess in der nördlichen Region Ghanas eine maßgebliche Rolle gespielt und zu einer friedlichen Streitbeilegung beigetragen. Der vorliegende Aufsatz untersucht die Faktoren, welche den erfolgreichen Einsatz von ZGOs im Friedensprozess in Nord-Ghana begünstigt haben. Mittels qualitativer und quantitativer Forschungsansätze zeigt die Studie auf, dass die Neutralität und Unparteilichkeit der ZGOs das Vertrauen der Konfliktparteien in ihre Arbeit geweckt haben. Die Kompetenz, methodische Vorgehensweise und Sichtbarkeit der ZGOs wiederum machte ihre Arbeit für alle Seiten akzeptierbar, und mittels Koordination und Networking konnte dem Konzept des Peacebuilding schließlich Gestalt verliehen und ein Synergieeffekt erzielt werden. Die Studie kommt zu dem Schluss, dass ZGOs seitens der von Konflikten betroffenen Gemeinden besser anerkannt, respektiert und gegenüber staatlichen Institutionen bevorzugt werden.

Abstract: Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Northern Region of Ghana have played significant roles in peacebuilding processes, resulting in the peaceful settlement of disputes. This paper examined the factors that have facilitated the successful entry of CSOs in peacebuilding processes in northern Ghana. Employing qualitative and quantitative research approaches, the study revealed that, the neutrality and impartiality of CSOs have made conflicting parties to trust their work. Again, the capacity of CSOs, method of delivery and visibility has made their work more acceptable by all. Finally, the idea of coordination and networking has shaped the concept of peacebuilding and the avoidance of the duplication of efforts. This research concludes that CSOs are more recognized, respected and preferred by communities experiencing conflicts, than state institutions.

1. Introduction

Within the wider global development agenda, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been identified as key stakeholders playing pivotal roles. The efforts of CSOs in the global democratization process, poverty reduction, advancement of human rights, good governance, debt relief and good aid have been widely acknowledged. In the view of Veltmeyer (2009), Civil Society Organisations have been broadly seen as agents for limiting authoritarian government, empowering a popular movement, reducing the atomizing and unsettling effects of market forces, enforcing political accountability and improving the quality and inclusiveness of governance. Similarly, Lewis & Kanji (2009) observed that CSOs have been recognized as important actors in the landscape of development, from reconstruction efforts in Indonesia, India, Thailand and Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami disaster, to international campaigns for aid and trade reforms such as "make poverty history". As development agents therefore, CSOs are best known to undertake two main activities, direct service delivery to people in need and policy advocacy.

One major area that has experienced an increasing interest, visibility and influence of Civil Society fraternity is peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and this according to Ekiyor (2008) has grown globally. This wider interest, visibility and influence in issues of peacebuilding, conflict resolution and peacemaking is attributed to a number of reasons. Of critical importance is the fact that conflicts undermine the developmental efforts of CSOs. In times of conflicts, the efforts and activities of CSOs are usually destabilized and the attention of CSOs shifts from policy advocacy to humanitarian assistance. It is also argued that, conflicts erode the gains made by CSOs in the areas of policy advocacy, education, health and good governance. Barnes (2006) highlighted that, the current interest in peacebuilding by CSOs stems from the fact that the cost of conflict has increased dramatically for ordinary people. Civilians such as women and children have become major targets of violence and civilian death. Further, Barnes observed that forcible displacement and massacres; the targeting of women and children and abduction of children as soldiers; environmental destruction and economic collapse creating profound impoverishment; the legacies of crippling bitterness, fear and division are some of the many reasons why civil society actors feel compelled to use their energy and creativity to find alternatives to violence, to end wars, and prevent them from starting or reoccurring.

Ignited by these reasons and many others, Civil Society Organisations have played significant roles in several negotiated settlements in countries that have been engulfed in violent conflicts for decades. According to Ekiyor (2008), the inability of the warring factions to reach sustainable and implementable agreements, for example the failures of the Abidjan Peace Accord of 1996 and the Conakry Peace Plan of 1997 in Sierra Leone led many civil society actors to inject themselves into subsequent talks. Civil society actors argued that the voices and needs of ordinary citizens needed to be heard and discussed at the peace table. Ekiyor affirms that CSOs' expertise, skills

and capacities were useful in creating the right conditions for talks, building confidence between parties, shaping the conduct and content of negotiations, and influencing the sustainability of peace agreements. Groups like the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia and of Sierra Leone, the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) and the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) have been critical to ensuring that warring factions came to the negotiating table and that the agreements reached reflected the needs of the people. During the actual peace talks, these CSOs have engaged in behind-the-scenes diplomacy, urging compromise and in many cases building trust between the parties.

A plethora of scholarly research (Linde & Naylor, 1999, Assefa, 2001 and Jönsson, 2007, 2009) concluded that, it was the efforts of civil society organisations in the Northern Region of Ghana that resulted in the peaceful settlement of protracted ethnic conflicts that engulfed the region in 1994. The CSOs came together to form a consortium of Inter-Non-governmental organisations to provide humanitarian relief in the aftermath of violence, destruction and displacement of people. The Consortium also made some attempts at reconciliation and peace processes aimed at ending violence in the short term and to promote sustainable peace in the long term through change perceptions, attitudes and building new relationships among societies in the region (Linde & Naylor, 1999:54). In collaboration with the Nairobi Peace Initiative and the Permanent Peace Negotiation Team (PPN) six workshops and negotiation meetings with the parties were initiated. This mediation process brokered a peace treaty with the warring factions on 28th March, 1996 known as the Kumasi Peace Accord.

These efforts and achievements have been acknowledged both at the national and global level. In the view of Forster & Mattner (2007), the United Nations Security Council in September, 2005 highlighted the comparative advantage of CSOs in facilitating dialogue and providing community leadership in times of conflict. According to the African Union (2008), the transformation of the OAU to the AU has involved a shift in the continental body's peace and security agenda—from a focus on conflict management to a broader and arguably more challenging mandate, embracing complex issues of peacebuilding. The enormity of the challenges involved in peacebuilding, particularly its early warning dimensions, together with the limited capacity of the AU, imply that more stakeholders be involved in this new peace and security agenda. Civil Societies are strategic stakeholders in the actualization of this agenda because of their proximity to the grassroots (from where they can provide firsthand information on conflict situations), and their expertise in conflict analysis.

While there has been a litany of research (Wumbla, 2007, Linde & Naylor, 1999, Assefa, 2001, Ekiyor, 2008) on the success stories of the work of CSOs in peacebuilding both at the national and international levels, the underlying factors that have facilitated this success have been left unattended to in the scholarly study of CSOs in peacebuilding. This paper therefore raises issues about the role of CSOs in peacebuilding in terms of the factors that have facilitated the successful entry and achievements.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

2.1. Conflict

Conflict is generally perceived as the existence of incompatible needs and goals between two or more groups. Coser (1956) asserts that, conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rival. Also Donohue & Kolt (1992) defined conflict as a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interest, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals. Summarizing from these definitions are two clear issues that are relevant to understanding conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana and for that matter Northern Ghana; needs and the means to satisfying these needs. A careful analysis of conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana reveals that, the inability of most ethnic groups to meet their needs-identity, recognition, self-actualization, power among others-as a result of denial by one group or other factors is the major driving force. Also there are no clear procedures (means) to addressing these unmet needs. In most cases the authority to address the concerns of these groups is a party to the conflict. Conflicts in Northern Region therefore emerge in response to unmet needs and involve the attempt to satisfy them. For the purpose of this paper, conflict will be defined as the existence of incompatible goals or the means to achieving these goals between individuals or identifiable groups. This incompatibility arises within a defined relationship and therefore any attempt to establish peace must focus on transforming the existing relationship between the parties.

2.2. Civil Society and Civil Society Organisations

Within the political and development discourse, there is no general consensus on the definition of the terms Civil Society and Civil Society Organisation. For the purpose of this study however, the definitions given by the World Bank and the London School of Economics will be adopted. The London School of Economics (as cited in World Bank, 2010) conceived Civil Society as the arena of un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. It is a public sphere where citizens and voluntary organizations freely engage, as such

distinct from the state, the family and the market. It is, however, closely linked through various forms of cooperation with those spheres, and boundaries may sometimes be difficult to distinguish.

On the other hand, the World Bank (2010) defined Civil Society Organisations as the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. The term goes beyond the narrower (and to many donors, more familiar) category of development-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and depicts a broad range of organizations, such as community groups, women's association, labor unions, indigenous groups, youth groups, registered charitable organizations, foundations, faith-based organizations, independent media, professional associations, think tanks, independent educational organizations and social movements.

This Study conceptualizes Civil Society as a space or a sphere that people or group of people associate with based on values and interest which individuals or groups of people seek to promote through the formation of organisations. A careful analysis of CSOs in the Northern Region of Ghana shows a similar trend. All CSOs in the region are established to promote a certain kind of value or interest. Within the peacebuilding domain, the value of peace and the interest to establish a society and culture of peace has led to the formation of organisations independent of the state, family and business sector. These organisations have valued peace as an important ingredient for promoting development in an underdeveloped region and therefore have over the years initiated actions towards this objective. It therefore within this logic, that this study is fashioned.

2.3. Peacebuilding

The definition of peacebuilding has varied over time and space. This difficulty is often associated with the exact phase peacebuilding activities are carried out. In the Agenda for Peace, Boutros-Ghali (1992) viewed peacebuilding as a post conflict activity and therefore contextualized the concept as actions to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. Miller (2005) contextualizes peacebuilding as a process of institutional building and reforms. In that regard Miller defined peacebuilding as policies, programmes and associated efforts to restore stability and the effectiveness of social, political and economic institutions and structures in the wake of a war or some other debilitating and catastrophic events. The major task of peacebuilding according to Miller is to create and ensure the conditions for 'negative peace' the mere absence of violent conflict management and for 'positive peace' a more comprehensive understanding related to institutionalization of justice and freedom. For Tschirgi (2003) peacebuilding aims at the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts, the consolidation of peace once violence has been reduced and post-conflict reconstruction with a view to avoiding a relapse into violent conflict. Peacebuilding seeks to address the proximate and root causes of contemporary conflicts including structural, political, socio-cultural, and economic and environment factors. Lederach (1997) considers the term to involve a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct.

Peacebuilding activities at whatever level of implementations are aimed at consolidating and securing peace. The activities are focused on addressing the factors that may in the short to medium term threaten a lapse or relapse into conflict as well as the root causes of conflict that may threaten the peace in the long term. The overarching goal of peacebuilding therefore is to strengthen the capacities of societies to manage conflict without violence as a means to achieve sustainable human security. For the purpose of this research, peacebuilding will be defined as *the employment of measures to consolidate peaceful relations and create an environment that deters the emergence or escalation of tensions which may lead to conflict.* (International Alert,1996).

3. Methodology

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods in the collection and analysis of the data. The research design was basically the case study approach. This approach was employed to create space for the detailed description of the topic. The study relied on three major population groups namely the Civil Society Organisations and staff that have been involved in peacebuilding activities since 1994, beneficiaries of CSOs interventions and Officials of government institutions that partnered or collaborated with the CSOs. In selecting respondents for the study, the study relied on multiple sampling techniques. A purposive sampling technique was employed in sampling the CSOs, respondents from the CSOs and Government Institutions. This method was used because it allowed for the sampling of respondents who are relevant to the study and have detailed information that is of relevance to study. In selecting respondents from the beneficiaries' category, a potential list was generated from the CSOs and developed into clusters according to the CSOs. A simple random technique was then used to select a respondent from each cluster. A total of thirty-six respondents were sampled from the three categories, namely CSOs staff, state institutions and beneficiaries of CSOs interventions as shown in table 1 below.

Category	n	%
Staff of CSOs	12	33.33
Beneficiaries	12	33.33
State Institutions	12	33.33
Total	36	100.00

Source: Field Work, February, 2014

Table 1: Category of respondents for the study.

In addition, twelve (12) Civil Society Organisations were sampled from twenty-four (24) Civil Society Organisations using purposive sampling techniques. Although all these organisations were identified as having activities relating to peacebuilding in the region, the time frame/duration of the activity and location, were the parameters for using the purposive sampling techniques to sample the twelve organisations for the study as shown in table 2 below.

No.	Name of Organisation	Type of organization
1.	West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Ghana)	NGO-Local
2.	Centre for Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies	Research Institution/NGO
3.	Women in Peacebuilding (WIP)	CBO-Women's group
4.	Foundation for Security and Development in Africa	NGO
5.	ActionAid Ghana (AAG)	NGO
6.	SEND Ghana	NGO
7.	DAWAH Academy	Faith Based Organisation(FBO)
8.	Sustainable Peace Initiative	NGO
9.	Business Development and Consultancy Services	CBO
10.	Community Development and Youth Advisory Centre	CBO
11.	Centre for the Promotion of Youth Development and Empowerment	CBO-Youth Association
12.	Amasachina Self-Help Association	CBO

Source: Field work, February, 2014

Table 2: List of Organisations selected for the study.

The research gathered data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected from the field and included responses from representatives of CSOs, beneficiaries of CSOs interventions and heads of government institutions that partnered with the CSOs. The secondary data was acquired from quarterly and yearly reports of CSOs and government Institutions as well as published and unpublished sources.

In the process of data collection, the study employed the interview method with a focus on two categories-the closed quantitative interview and the interview guide approach. The closed quantitative approach employed to gather data on the background of the CSOs sampled and the respondents. In gathering data on the enabling factors, the research used the interview guide approach. The interview guide was structured according to themes that were generated from preliminary discussions with directors of CSOs and review of literature.

Basic descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used in analyzing the background of the CSOs and the respondents sampled from the three population groups. In addition, the research employed thematic analysis that was supported with content analysis of the transcribed interviews and secondary documents. The themes for the analysis were developed through a preliminary research with heads of CSOs and review of literature. After the data were transcribed, the content was analysed and then coded manually based on the themes of the interviews. The themes were then interpreted to generate meanings and understanding.

4. Results and discussions

4.1. Background of Respondents and Civil Society Organisations

The respondents selected for the study comprised both male and female. The female respondents comprised six staff of the CSOs, five beneficiaries and three officials of state institutions all aged between 25 and 63. The number of years of working experience ranged from two to ten years. In terms of the level of education of the females, the minimum level was Cert A and the highest was that of Master's degree (MPhil). The male participants comprised ten staff of the CSOs, five officials of state institutions and seven beneficiaries aged between 25 and 60, with the minimum level of education being Cert A and the highest, post-graduate (PhD). The number of years of working experience in peacebuilding ranged from five to twenty-three years. All the respondents had worked in communities that have experienced violent conflicts.

In terms of the organisational origin, it was revealed that out of the 12 civil society organizations used for the study, three fell under the grassroots category, eight could be classified under other indigenous category, and one was of international origin. With the exception of four organizations that were specialised in a single type of activity-advocacy, all the other organisations in the sample were undertaking activities in both categories

(operational and advocacy). In terms of the current level of operation, one organization operated at the local level, two operated at the regional level, nine operated at the national level and with no organisation operating at the international level. The headquarters of all the CSOs surveyed were located in urban areas. With the exception of CECOTAPS which had its headquarters in Damango the remaining 11 had their headquarters located in Tamale.

In terms of the operational activities, all the 12 civil society Organisations worked in both rural and urban areas. With regard to funding, CSOs primarily relied on donor support with other sources including membership fees and local fund raising. Five organisations (AAG, SPI, WIP, CYPDE and FOSDA) solely depended on donor support, another three (SEND Ghana, CECOTAPS and Amasachina Self Help Association) had received funds from donors and have also undertaken local fundraising. Two organisations (WANEP-Ghana and CODYAC) financed their activities from membership fees as well as donor funding, while two (BADECC and DAWAH) in addition, carry out local fund raising.

4.2. Factors facilitating the successful entry of CSOs in peacebuilding initiatives

Over the years the success of CSOs in the region in promoting sustainable peace and championing peacebuilding is attributed to a number of factors. This section therefore discusses the internal factors of CSOs that have facilitated their smooth entry into peacebuilding in the Northern Region of Ghana. Issues such as neutrality and impartiality, credibility, integrity and trust, capacity of CSOs, networking and coordination among CSOs, approach and methodology of CSOs, and visibility will be the focus of this section.

4.2.1. Neutrality and impartiality of Civil Society Organisations

In analyzing the data, the study found out that the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in their quest to intervene in conflict situations remain neutral and impartial. The work of the CSOs focuses on the main conflicting issues, as such advance solutions and recommendations on how these can be addressed. This character and approach has made the work of the CSOs legitimate and acceptable to parties and communities in conflict. In the case of the 1994 ethnic conflicts that engulfed the entire Northern Region, it was the factor of neutrality and impartiality exhibited by the Inter Non-governmental Organisation Consortium (Inter NGO Consortium) that facilitated the peaceful settlement of the conflict. The efforts of the Permanent Peace Negotiation Team setup by the state were not widely accepted by the conflicting parties since its credibility was questioned. This is supported by Fitzduff (2004) who states that CSOs have embedded neutrality and impartiality in their course to supporting peacebuilding activities and therefore they are much more freer than governments in deciding to which of the parties they will talk with and have used this opportunity to talk to those who are often outside the reach of governments in most conflicts.

In establishing legitimacy of the work of the CSOs, the basic approach adopted by the CSOs was the creation of a platform for the involvement of all stakeholders (primary, secondary and tertiary). The platform according to the CSOs allowed for the parties/stakeholders to play a lead role in the conflict resolution processes. The role of the CSOs according to the respondents is to facilitate and provide the needed technical support that required. All the respondents made reference to the Kumasi Peace Accord that was initiated by the Inter-NGO Consortium in the wake of the 1994 ethnic conflict. In this case, the work of the Consortium was to facilitate the process and as well provide the needed technical support. In all, the responses from the CSOs indicate that neutrality and impartiality are crucial in maintaining the consent and cooperation of the parties involved in the conflict and therefore they avoid certain actions and inactions that might compromise their image of neutrality and impartiality.

According to the Director of CODYAC Mr. Alhassan Abdulai: *Civil Society Organisations are non-partisan and therefore do not do things based on the structure of a political party or based on the desire to satisfy a particular section of society. CSOs perform their activities on the principle of sound judgment. These therefore make CSOs neutral in the area of peacebuilding.* One beneficiary stated that: *"You see these people (i.e CSOs), they are neutral and open minded. When they come here, they do not take sides; they interact with everybody and are always prepared to listen to you. When they bring items to share, they often give the items to those who need them. Therefore we are always prepared to work and talk to them and we are happy with that"* (Thursday, February 10, 2014, unstructured interview as mode of enquiry).

While the issues of impartiality and neutrality are widely acknowledged, the very existence of the CSOs in the arena of peacebuilding is perceived by certain actors as partial and bias. This perception is created by actors who have vested interest in the continuation of the conflict. This perception according to the respondents is widely generated during the initial entering processes, especially when it involves chieftaincy and where the efforts of the CSOs have become in direct opposition to the interest of conflict entrepreneurs. The major question that arises is which chief or 'gate' should be visited first? The CSOs expressed this challenge as eminent in Dagbon, Bimbilla and Buipe where the underlying conflicting issue is the rightful occupant to the chief ship. In situations of

these, the CSOs have been accused of undermining the legitimacy of one gate or the other. The CSOs whilst admitting to this challenge have recognized the role of impartiality and neutrality in their work especially in situations that are fragile. As such responses from the CSOs indicate that, there has always been a constant engagement with all stakeholders in order to build trust among the stakeholders and CSOs.

4.2.2. Capacity of Civil Society Organisations

The results of the research found that Civil Society Organisations in the region have the capacity to facilitate a peacebuilding process and behavioral change in communities experiencing conflict as compared to decentralized state agencies. Three major issues were raised by respondents—the human resource based of the CSOs, the financial capacity and the knowledge about the conflict. In the study, 30% of the respondents indicated that CSOs as compared to state institutions at the local governance level have the financial resources to undertake peacebuilding activities. According to the respondents, there is no financial commitment by government agencies to undertake peacebuilding activities. The respondents stated that this situation is due to the long term held perception that, issues of security are national in perspective and therefore need to be handled at that level. According to one respondent, Miss Euraka Pwanang: *“Even when you go to the District Assemblies, and look at their plans whether medium term or action plans you hardly come across activities that are aimed at promoting sustainable peace in the communities, how much a budgetary allocations for such activities”* (Thursday, February 17, 2014 solicited through unstructured interviews). Also 50% of the respondents indicated that the CSOs have the human resource or personnel who are well motivated, have the skills and knowledge in peacebuilding and therefore they can become more effective in the delivery of peacebuilding services. Some of the respondents mentioned the use of volunteers by organisations such as SEND Ghana, CODYAC, WANEP and BADECC in situations where the permanent staff of the organisations is exhausted. A triangulation from these organisations shows the recruitment of volunteers from the communities who are trained in basic concepts of peace and conflict. This approach brings a sense of ownership and commitment, rather than doing a job on behalf of an employer. Besides, 20% of the respondents emphasised the point that CSOs have the knowledge base of local histories, local issues, cultures and needs and are therefore capable to function in diverse circumstances even where governments cannot, the study reveals. This according to the respondents is due to the use of indigenous people and the formation of peace committees using members of the communities. With these structures, the CSOs acquire better understanding of the conflict, its historical perspectives, values, norms and peacebuilding processes within.

These findings corroborates the views of Caparini & Cole (2008), who argued that the call for civil society participation in peacebuilding is a product of their expertise and capacity to independently evaluate, challenge or endorse government decisions concerning issues relating to conflict such as peace deals, protection of human rights, governance and democracy, and public security affairs. Again, Caparini & Cole (2008) suggest that CSOs are often more aware of local needs and conditions than governments and their local agencies. They can provide detailed information on the needs and interest of communities affected by conflicts to public authorities for action. Based on the three critical issues raised, the respondents argued that CSOs have the capacity to fill in the gaps that have been left out by the state institutions especially at the local level where there are no government structures to address issues of conflict and even to promote sustainable peace in such areas.

To a large extent however, the capacity of the CSOs to intervene in peacebuilding as an enabling factor is been hampered by the frequent exodus of staff and short term donor financing. According to the respondents, inadequate donor funding and short term funding impedes the strategic planning, specialisation and sustained engagement with specific areas and communities. The use of volunteers also negatively affects the quality of work they do. The volunteers are not paid or even at times motivated and therefore one is not obliged to work hard as paid staff will do. Also the volunteers are not qualified personnel. At times they receive just a week's training in what they are supposed to do and are therefore inexperienced especially in the area of conflict prevention which is a complex and emotional area. This calls for partnership and networking among the civil society organisations in the region. In the view of the respondents, this will create the platform for the identification of common synergies in peacebuilding. Such a move will invariably minimize the negative impact of limited and short term donor funding and staff exodus. Currently, the West African Network for Peacebuilding, Ghana Office has created a platform for such a network in the region. However, there appears to be a limited interest in the activities of the network by some organisations.

4.2.3. Approach and methodology of Civil Society Organisations

Respondents of the study have also established that the methods and strategies employed by the organisations in addressing the issues of conflict is an important factor that has facilitated their work. According to the respondents, the methods and strategies employed by the organisations make their activities responsive to the needs of all stakeholders in conflict. In the view of the respondents, organisations such as CODYAC, DAWAH, BADECC and CPYDE employ community-based peacebuilding initiatives through the use of local knowledge and

resources. In the words of the Director of BADECC, Mr. Issahaku Yabyure Jesimuni: *"CSOs make use of grassroots approaches which involve the participation of the local people in the identification of their needs and interest in conflict and peacebuilding. This promotes the ownership of the whole process as well as the people having confidence in whatever is being done. Suspicion is reduced and a level playing field is created for all to participate"*. (Unstructured interviews conducted on Tuesday, February 8, 2014). Other respondents mentioned that the application of restorative methods and strategies by organisations such as CECOTAPS, WANEP and AAG to resolve conflict issues instead of retributive strategies best serves and addresses the concerns of all parties. In the words of Rev. Fr. Lazarus of CECOTAPS: *"When it comes to peacebuilding, CSOs make use of restorative justice and alternative dispute resolution methods and not the law courts where the communities do not trust the process. For instance most of our chieftaincy disputes that have been taken to the law courts have not been resolved"* (Unstructured Interview conducted on Wednesday, February 2, 2014).

In addition, respondents indicated that the ability of CSOs to often identify and involve a wide range of actors and stakeholders in the peacebuilding process is one enabling factors that has facilitated the active involvement of CSOs in peacebuilding. For these respondents, every single stakeholder has an important role to play both as part of the problem and as potential peacebuilders and therefore it is imperative to undertake a stakeholder analysis, identify the major and hidden ones and as much as possible involve them in the peacebuilding process from the beginning to the end. According to the SEND Ghana Programmes Officer for Salaga, Mr. Raymond Avatim, *"SEND Foundation engages the youth and women who are both key to the peace process in the community. Women for instance can be both a source of the conflict and potential peacemakers. Women can energise and have authority to rally men to violence and they have the propensity for fighting, talking and stirring up conflict; they also have a strong influence to mediate within the family and to quell men's violent desire; as traders they have the potential to build bridges across ethnic or other divides; women are often involved in practical issues that sometimes lead to conflict such as water collection, and thus have the potential to act as mediators in such situations"*. (Wednesday, February 9, 2014 through unstructured interview). Overall, the respondents in the sample of the research argue that CSOs select the appropriate methods and strategies which are accepted by the people and also identifies with the people. In addition, these methods and strategies are flexible and responsive to the needs of the people in conflict; inspire and equip the communities to own the peacebuilding process for themselves.

This confirms the view of Omona (2008) who stated that is the establishment of local based structures makes peacebuilding interventions much more recipient-friendly. Its participatory processes according to Omona is an engine for increased collaboration between and among population groups that have experienced tension resulting from conflicts and can help promote reconciliation. Also the participatory methodology builds trust and is a good weapon for managing expectations, and transparency in the input-output cycle of intervention is manifested and sustained. Whilst the approaches and methods are deemed to facilitate a peaceful and sustainable resolution of conflict, the inability to produce results immediately sometimes call to question the efficacy of these approaches. According to the respondents, peacebuilding activities do not have immediate results since much of the work involves advocacy and behavioral change. As a result, it takes longer periods to produce results or none at all. This dilemma invariably creates a situation where the efforts of the CSOs are not appreciated by the conflicting parties and other community members. This predicament, according to the respondents calls for more engagement with all the stakeholders to understand the role of the CSOs in the process of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This has been adopted by most of the CSOs in the sample, especially at the engagement stages of the peacebuilding processes.

4.2.4. Networking and coordination among Civil Society Organisations

Networking and coordination among CSOs is a factor in the operational environment of CSOs in the region which has facilitated the efforts of these organisations in contributing to peacebuilding in the region, the research reveals. This confirms Barnes (2006) view that partnership among CSOs whether at the local, national, regional and international level is an important opportunity for civil society actors to work for peace. Respondents from CODYAC, CPYDE, DAWAH Academy, and SEND Ghana stress that the networking and coordination established with other organisations in the region has facilitated information sharing and this has benefited the organisations' programmes and activities. These respondents are of the view that when partnerships and networks are established with CSOs, enough activism and attention is brought to the issues of peacebuilding which are critical ingredients to achieving the desired objectives in the field. As put by the Director of CECOTAPS, Rev. Lazarus Annyereh: *"Networking and coordination among CSOs especially in the field of peacebuilding is always an opportunity for CSOs to meet and discuss issues of common concern and also to share ideas, experiences and lessons that have been learned on the field in the implementation of conflict prevention initiatives"* (Wednesday, February 8, 2014 unstructured interviews).

Respondents from other organisations such as BADECC, WANEP, CECOTAPS, FOSDA and AAG accentuate that through networking and coordination, duplication of efforts is reduced which leads to the efficient use of scarce resources both financial and human. According to the Programme Officer of AAG, Mr. Edward Akapire: *"Through*

our network with WANEP, we have implemented some activities together. Initially we had similar activities on our work plans to be implemented in the same community, but through networking we were able to draw our resources and efforts together and that activity-peace football gala-was organised in the target community” (Monday, February 14, 2014 Unstructured interviews).

The research established that in the region, there are two major networks of organisations that are into peacebuilding. These networks are WANEP and Sustainable Peace Initiative. WANEP is a network of about forty organisations made up of civil society organisations, multilateral organisations and state institutions. SPI has about thirteen members in its network comprising state institutions and CSOs. All the organisations in the sample of this study confirmed belonging to one of the networks and they highlight that as a result of their membership to these networks it has served as an important strategy in achieving organizational goals and objectives. In general, the respondents interviewed underscore the importance of networking and coordination as a supporting factor for CSOs contribution to peacebuilding, and have therefore called for the need to develop and create networks with partners not only within the arena of peacebuilding but across diverse sectors.

Generally however, the presents of unnecessary competition and rivalry among CSOs in the region for funding from the same source has become an impediment for effective networking and coordination according to the respondents. Within the two networks, it was established that, there is more competition for resources and self-recognition than that of effective networking and partnership for peacebuilding in the region. Also, some of the networks are established and supported by donors and therefore become weak when donor funding is pulled out. Although it is impossible to completely remove the element of competition and rivalry among the CSOs in the field of peacebuilding, one of the networks WANEP has created a platform to attract more organisations and as well motivate those on it to stay. Using its leverage as a more recognized CSO in peacebuilding, WANEP has created a platform for the training of other CSOs. Also the organisation has created a portal for CSOs to find funding opportunities for peacebuilding. Through these platforms, the respondents indicated that more CSOs are encouraged to network and partner in the design and implementation of peacebuilding projects.

5. Conclusion

Civil Society Organisations have emerged to be playing critical roles in peacebuilding activities in conflict zones especially in the developing world. Since the outbreak of the 1994 ethnic conflict that engulfed the entire Northern Region of Ghana, there has been an increasing visibility of CSOs in the Region engaging in peacebuilding activities. These activities, according to most scholars have largely contributed to creating and establishing peace in a region that was classified as a high risk security (conflict) zone. Bombande (2007) recounts the role of the Inter-NGO consortium in broking a peace deal among the warring factions in the 1994 ethnic conflicts. These and many other success stories have been documented by scholars.

While these success stories are known, the underlying factors both within and without the civil society fraternity that have largely contribute to the success stories have not been critically looked. It is therefore in line with this objective that this paper was fashioned. It was observed that CSOs are neutral and impartial and therefore can work in areas and talk to people where government cannot reach. Further, CSOs have the capacity, resources and skills as compared to government agencies at the local level to undertake conflict prevention activities. In addition, CSOs have established some kind of credibility and integrity in peacebuilding based on the success stories of these organisations in the field. Also, CSOs adopt appropriate methods and strategies that make their interventions responsive to the needs of all stakeholders.

The existence of networks has made the work of CSOs more relevant in the field of peacebuilding. While acknowledging that the strengths and supporting factors within the civil society sector are crucial in ensuring the effective participation of CSOs in peacebuilding, their effectiveness also depends on the nature and severity of the conflict itself and the role of political actors. CSOs should not be seen as a substitute for peacebuilding, but rather playing a supportive role and that the central impetus for peace comes primarily from political actors and protagonists. Therefore, the attitude of government, local politicians and the protagonists to CSOs are equally relevant.

One interesting finding that needs critical consideration is the differences in opinion and thought about the involvement of CSOs in peacebuilding. Whilst, it is generally stated by respondents that CSOs are more recognized, respected and preferred by communities experiencing conflicts, the efforts of the CSOs have been questioned because the results take longer periods to show or results are not achieved at all. This situation is more peculiar to activities such as socialization, capacity building, mediation, education and peace campaigns. The most crucial question is whether the impact is related to the way the activities are conducted or certain contextual factors outside the realm of the CSOs. This there calls for research on the external or contextual factors that influence the efforts of CSOs. Issues such as the activities of the state, the nature of the conflict, the media landscape, donor conditionality's and that of political activism.

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